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ABSTRACT

A program for children with communication disorders (autistic-like behaviors) has been developed by the Kent (Ohio) Public Schools' Special Education program and is intended to eventually integrate the children served into other special education classrooms and, ultimately, into the home school special education program. Among the program's objectives are to provide an educational program for 18 autistic children, to provide individual and group guidance for parents of autistic children, and to help determine the percent of autistic children that are educable but are misdiagnosed as trainable by individual IQ tests. The diagnostic/prescriptive instructional program provides language centered training in academic, psychomotor, and social-affective skills. (SB)

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INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISTIC LIKE BEHAVIOR

Presented at

C.E.C. Annual International Convention
Chicago, Illinois

April 5, 1976

by

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PREFACE

The program for children with communication disabilities (autistic-like behaviors) is part of the Kent Public Schools' Special Education program in Kent, Ohio. Funding for the program is provided by the Kent Public Schools, tuition from the participating regional schools, the Ohio Department of Education as a program for severe and multiply impaired children, and Title VI-B. Financial assistance for the program from the State Department and Title VI-B is on an annual basis and continuation of these funds must be approved each spring for the following year.

Since the Kent Schools have only a total enrollment of 4,367, 95% of the children enrolled in the program are from schools within the Mid-Eastern Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center (MEO/SERRC).

HISTORY

The first class was started in the Fall of 1973 with four children, ages 6 to 14. One certified teacher and a full-time assistant were hired to begin the program. As student enrollment grew, a second class was begun in the 1974-75 school year and a third class in 1975-76. Presently there are three full-time teachers and three full-time aides employed. Kent State University special education students also serve as volunteer aides. Consultative services are provided by Dr. Ronald Kingsley, Special Education Professor, Kent State University, and Robert Robinson, school psychologist for low incidence handicapped children for the MEO/SERRC.

Support personnel available from the Kent Schools include speech therapists, school psychologists, elementary guidance, and consultant services from supervisors of L.D., E.M.R., and H.I. All personnel are directly administratively responsible to Michael Chrin, Director of Child Study and Special Education.

PROGRAM

Objectives: This program has six major objectives. They are:

1. continue experimental education program for autistic children initiated in 73-74 to demonstrate that:
   a. 75% of autistic children are educable
   b. autistic children's receptive, inner, and expressive language can be improved
   c. autistic children's frequency of negative behavior responses can be reduced
2. help determine the percent of autistic children that are educable but are mis-diagnosed as trainable by individual I.Q. tests;
3. provide an educational program for 18 autistic children;
4. refer to trainable programs autistic children observed to be uneducable as determined by appropriate individual I.Q. tests AND documented class records indicating inability to achieve specific educational objectives;
5. provide individual and group guidance for parents of autistic children; and
6. serve as a pilot and demonstration program for northeast Ohio educators interested in a direct observation of a program for autistic children.

Admissions: The following criteria are used for consideration in the program:

1. the child cannot adequately be accommodated in any existing public school special education program because of severe communication, behavioral, or developmental problems;

2. he/she is suspected of being capable of profiting substantially from instruction as demonstreated in the class on a trial basis, through observation and/or a multi-factored assessment procedure administered by a qualified school psychologist;

3. the child is diagnosed as autistic-like by a psychiatrist and/or functions autistic-like as determined by the selection committee composed of the Director of Child Study and Special Education, a school psychologist, a speech therapist, and the special education teacher of the class;

4. he/she has or will receive a comprehensive medical examination by a licensed physician that includes a test for hypoglycemia, hyperthyroidism, and allergenics. Medical consultation will be encouraged on a continuing basis;

5. the parents of the child request and approve in writing the child's participation in the program; and

6. a child with a clinical diagnosis of severe mental retardation, such as Down's Syndrome, would not be eligible.

Activities: The children in the three classes for this program demonstrate behaviors which tend to interfere with their ability to successfully function in other special education or regular classroom settings. The instructional experiences provided in this program are diagnostic/prescriptive. The academic, psychomotor, and social-affective skills occurring within the daily program are language centered. The immediate goal is to provide the children with successful individualized learning experiences. The curriculum is designed around Hewett's (1968) developmental sequence of educational goals. The program begins at the attention level with emphasis on establishing eye contact, especially with those who are withdrawn or resistant to human interaction. Response and order goals are later undertaken. For the more advanced student, activities are directed to the exploratory, social, and mastery levels, keeping in mind the need for success oriented tasks in a structured environment. Due to the nature of the disabilities, inconsistencies in the developmental sequences are present due to the splinter skills.

Schedule: The daily schedule is organized so that each child experiences a variety of different interpersonal situations, i.e., large group, small group, and individual. Scheduling provides structure for the child. In this program it was found that a maximum of 20 minutes per learning activity is optimum. Each child is in contact with a number of different adults throughout the day. The time and nature of the learning tasks vary in order to avoid the development of rituals or fixed patterns of behavior. Appropriate rewards are provided upon successful completion of each task. The full time assistants and part time Special Education volunteers from Kent State University make it possible to conduct many different kinds of learning activities with the children. They are involved in both academic and non-academic interactions.

Records: Keeping daily records is an integral part of the daily program. Information is kept on academic, social, affective, and psychomotor development. The data is studied in relationship to the effects of the various interventions that are employed.

Parents: Parent participation is strongly desired. One or both parents are provided opportunities to learn through both the classroom program and special study groups. The focus is on learning how to observe and keep accurate at home records of their child's behavior and how to more effectively manage him/her.

GOALS

The above mentioned ideas and techniques are all aimed toward eventual successful integration of the child into other special education classrooms and ultimately placement within the home school special education program. Currently classroom programs for the deaf are employed for language growth, also when indicated classes for the educable mentally retarded, learning disabilities, and social growth experiences. The children, in attendance in these classes, are there on a part time basis. Once the child has sufficiently demonstrated success over a period of time he is evaluated for the purpose of possible return to his home school district. As the result of this experimental program, it is hoped these children will be better able to successfully experience a more productive and meaningful life.

Reference

Hewett, F. The Emotionally Disturbed Child in the Classroom. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc. 1968.